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ABSTRACT

John Dewey proposed a transactive educational process in which personal experiences and development interacted with curriculum in order to transform the learner and the learning procedure. The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate ways in which some of Dewey's concepts of progressive education provide a theoretical rationale for the increasing use of early childhood education community-based curriculum. Dewey's original writings on children and curriculum were used as the basis for this discussion. It is argued that, with the support of educational continuity, a predisposition to form habits and the ability to form contextual images, young children construct their own knowledge through experiences in community-based curriculum. (Author/HOD)

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John Dewey Revisited and Community-Based Curriculum

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Running head: JOHN DEWEY REVISITED AND COMMUNITY-BASED CURRICULUM

Abstract

John Dewey proposes a transactive educational process in which personal experiences and development interact with curriculum in order to transform the learner and ultimately the learning procedure. The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate ways in which some of Dewey's concepts of Progressive Education provide a theoretical rationale for the increasing use of Early Childhood Education community-based curriculum. Dewey's original writings on children and curriculum and experience in education were used as the basis for this discussion. With the support of educational continuity, a predisposition to form habits and the ability to form contextual images young children construct their own knowldge through experiences in community-based curriculum.

John Dewey Revisited and Community-based Curriculum

John Dewey, as the dominant proponent of Progressive Education, (1902, 1938) elaborates a transactive educational environment in which learners can integrate personal development and experiences with the heuristics of subject matter, by way of acting on and being acted upon. Within this constantly fluid process, internal capacities and social experiences connect with subject matter to transform the learner and ultimately the entire learning mode. This theory of transactive learning lends its support to the concept of community-based learning that is prevalent in Early Childhood Education curriculum. It is the intent of this paper to demonstrate ways in which some of Dewey's concepts of Progressive Education provide a theoretical rationale for the increasing use of community-based curriculum.

Connecting Experiential Learning

In viewing the human, life-long learning continuum as a circle that is sectioned into three parts the importance of connecting past, present and future learning is demonstrated.

Insert Diagram 1 about here

The first section of the circle encompasses learning that occurs from birth (possibly prenatal) until entry to kindergarten or first grade. This first learning period is characterized by informal learning experiences within the home and community. The second learning period starts at kindergarten/first grade and stops when "schooling" ends. It is characterized by formal experiences within the school setting. (Although it is obvious learning experiences continue in the home and commnity, a popular notion is that they occur dominantly in the school.) And the third period of learning is characterized once again by informal experiences within the home and community (schools now being a more integral part of the community.)

A number of questions can be posed in order to differentiate the three, rather distinct, human, life-long learning periods.

	Learning Periods		
	First	Second	Third
How is one educated?	Informally	Formally	Informally
What is the content of education?	Relations, attitudes, behavior, language, cognitive skills	Academic skills	Relations, attitudes, behavior, language, cogniive skills
Where does education occur?	Home, community	School	Home, community, school
Who are the learners?	All who are engaged in the learning process, family and community members,	School-age children	All who are engaged in the learning process, family and community members,

	children, friends, teachers		children friends, teachers
Who are the educators?	All who are engaged in learning process- family and community members, friends, teachers, children	Profes- sional teachers	All who are engaged in the learning process- family and community members, friends, teachers, children
When does education occur?	All day, every day	During school attendance	All day, every day
What is the role of the professional educator?	To be a leader and resource person for	To teach children	To be a leader and resource person for the educational

the educa-

tional

process

process

Dewey (1938) stressed the need to connect earlier experiential learning (First Period) with the experiences and knowledge inherent to the schooling procedure (Second Period). "It is essential...that the new objects and events be related intellectually to those of earlier experiences..." (p. 75). In addition, he believed, "Anything which can be called a study, whether arithmetic, history, geography, or one of the natural sciences, must be derived from materials which at the outset fall within the scope of ordinary life-experience." (p. 73). It is suggested then that experiential learning occuring prior to formal schooling be connected to the content of the formal schooling, and also, materials and resources that are part of the learners past connect with present learning experiences.

Dewey does not suggest that the content of formal schooling in the Second Period of the above proposed learning circle be deleted from learners' experiences. The hierarchical structure of subject-matter is a

necessary body of knowledge for educators and learners to share. He does (1902), however, encourage educators to, "abandon the notion of subject-matter as something fixed and ready-made in itself, outside the child's experience...realize that the child and the curriculum are simply two limits which define a single process..." (p. 11).

When Progressive Education reemerged in the 1960's as Child-Centered Education, a fundamental shift had been made from the original theory. Dewey (1938) envisioned experiential learning as a shared process between the learner and the situation.

> The conceptions of <u>situation</u> and of <u>interaction</u> are inseparable from each other. An experience is always what it is because of a transaction taking place between an individual and what, at the time, constitutes his environment, whether the later consists of persons with whom he is talking about some topic or event, the subject talked about being also part of the situation; or the toys with which he is playing; the book he is reading;... or the materials of an experiment he is performing. (p. 43-44).

Child-centered Education focused primarily on the needs, interest and priorities of the child, a process dominated by child-centered, resources, teaching and learning strategies. Subject-matter submerged to the structure of the child. Dewey foresaw a more collaborative process of child, resources, educators and subject-matter, each acting on the other, and being acted upon.

In addition, Dewey observed that children needed to individually reconstruct the knowledge base that adult educators knew and presupposed had to be told to learners. Learning is a "...continuous reconstruction moving from the child's present experience out into that represented by the organized bodies of truth that we call studies." (Dewey, 1902, p. 11). In a sense then, educators need to create possibilities for children to invent and discover the hierarchical facts and truths of subject-matter. Simply telling children does not constitute effective teaching and learning strategies.

Dewey, then, asked educators to use subject-matter in a fluid manner that used the child's experiential learning as the starting and continuing point of

connection; to participate in a shared process of educating and learning, and to facilitate the child's reconstruction of knowledge. If educators were to attempt this in good faith, then the three distinct periods of the learning circle would need to be a life-long continuum of connected and similar learning environments and teaching/learning strategies.

Connecting Community-based Curriculum to Life-long Learning

Following is a definition of community-based curriculum:

> The basic educational competencies are enhanced by relating these to real life situations in the community in which the school is located. Intense study of the local community becomes a springboard for study of life in other communities and the world. Study of the community in the community is an integral aspect of this emphasis. Such study will use available community facilities and resources, and include work and community service planned for educational outcomes. (Animating Community Schools, p. 4).

It is envisioned then, that curriculum, the heuristics of subject-matter, be adapted to include the more broad-based home and community learning experiences. The curriculum pattern is not just one of academic subjects isolated in self-contained classrooms, but rather of home and community experiential learning and academic subjects joining in a newer and more relevant integrated curriculum.

Continuity and Looping. Dewey (1938) discusses the principle of continuity of the experiential continuum. From birth to death, learners live in a world that is the way it is because of what has been transmitted from previous human activity. When this is ignored, as it often is in schools, educators begin to believe and treat experience as a phenomenom that occurs exclusively inside learners. Experience does not occur in isolation, but rather is stimulated by and interacts with sources outside learners. When educators break this connection they remove from the educational process a significant link to past, present and future experiential learning. Community-based curriculum provides the necessary organization and teaching/learning strategies to loop previous

experiential learning to school settings and subject-matter and vice-versa. This looping procedure would provide the entire life-long learning circle with continuity. The First Period would loop into and be received by the Second Period; the Second Period (now including the First) would loop into and be received by the Third Period of the learning circle.

Insert Diagram 2 about here

Learners would be provided with opportunities to build upon previous experiential learning and grow toward an integrated knowledge-base.

Continuity and Habit. Dewey (1938) also states that the foundation of the principle of continuity is the psychological construct of habit. "The basic characteristic of habit is that every experience enacted and undergone modifies the one who acts and undergoes, while the modification affects, whether we wish it or not, the quality of subsequent experiences." (p. 35). He elaborates that the principle of habit is

much deeper than the concept of "a habit." The principle of habituation implies the formation of basic cognitive and affective attitudes and behaviors. When educators ignore the individual habit of learners they require learners to discontinue what is lyrically their educational soul. Community-based curriculum reminds educators to integrate learners habits with subject matter and provides learners opportunities to grow and improve habituated experiential learning.

Contextual Images. It is believed that the hierarchical facts and truths of subject-matter need to be abstracted and isolated from the learners' experiential learning continuum, and many professional educators in schools appear to work on this notion. Dewey (1902) believes that the logically prepared and presented subject-matter is no substitute for individual experiential learning. "The mathematical formula for a falling body does not take the place of personal contact and immediate individual experience with the falling thing." (p. 20). Facts and truths of subject-matter must be embedded within the experiential learnings they relate to or describe. To take them out of these experiential learnings leaves them with very

little meaning and presents subject-matter with very little relevancy. Community-based curriculum attempts to embed academic knowledge in the home and community in order for learners to develop a meaningful and relevant experiential learning continuum.

When subject-matter truths and facts are embedded in the experiences of learners, the learners are able to develop contextual images of knowledge. Contextual images are the products of integrating subject-matter and experience and serve as the foundation for language and communication. Since contextual images are highly idiosyncratic, learners need to be encouraged to build on their individual experiences and community-based curriculum provides the teaching/learning strategies for professional educators to create situations where contextual images can be discovered and communicated.

Insert Diagram 3 about here

Community-based curriculum, then, provides the structure for some of John Dewey's principles to be

applied to the life-long, experiential learning circle. For educational philosophers AND practitioners these principles provide an elegant and much needed rationale for the implementation of community-based curriculum.

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DIAGRAM 1

Life-long Experiential Learning Circle

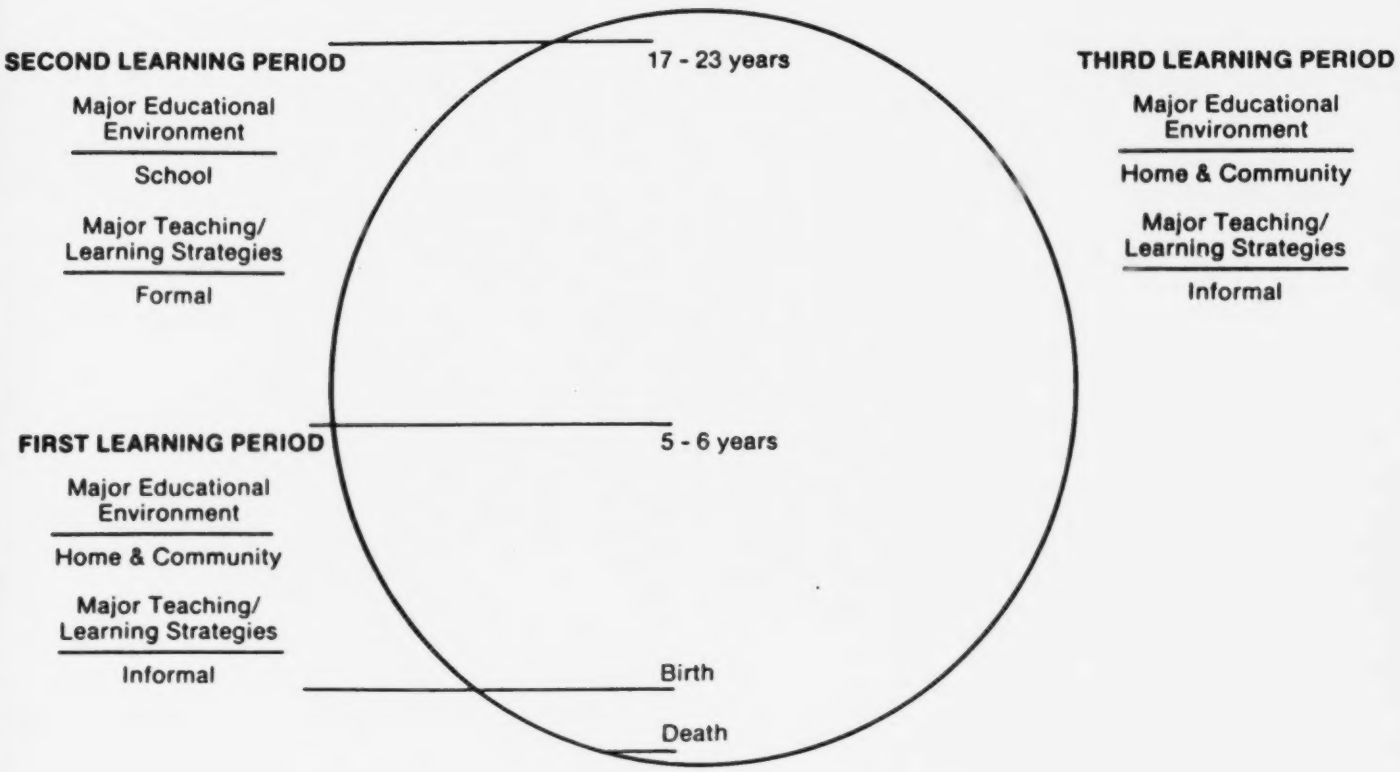

DIAGRAM 2

Community-Based Curriculum Looping

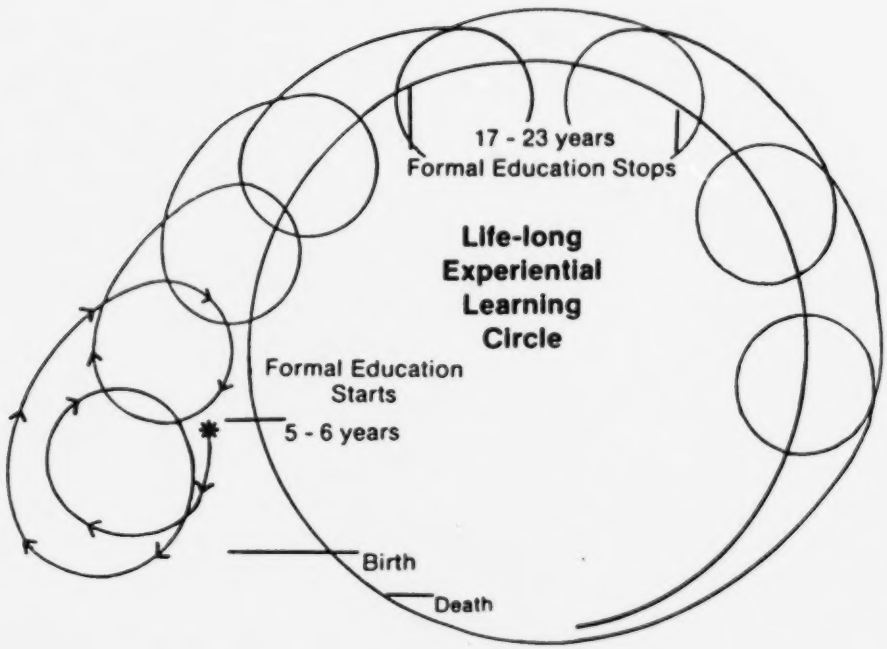

DIAGRAM 3

Progressive Education Rationale for Community-based Curriculum